

## ALLIANCE POSITION ON THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

The Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations is an International Non-Governmental Youth Organization that represents 50 member organizations in 28 countries in Europe, Asia and the Americas, among them 34 organizations based in 17 member states of the European Union and 44 in the Council of Europe member states. It was established in 1982 by organizations whose main aim is to promote international volunteering as a way to peace building, intercultural understanding and the creation of healthy and sustainable communities.

In 2015 the Alliance member organizations organized 1.210 international short-term voluntary group projects, so called “workcamps”, which gathered 13.643 volunteers for projects of 2 to 3 weeks on cross border activities or in their own country. 10.912 of these volunteers joined projects in a European country and 603 of them received a reinforced mentorship to overpass specific difficulties (educational, social, economic, disability). Besides these short-term projects, ALLIANCE members organized the placement of 2.403 volunteers on mid and long-term projects; out of which 753 young people did a European Voluntary Service (EVS). Recent impact research shows that IVS brings personal development, in terms of autonomy, (inter)cultural competences, conflict management or active citizenship (which are at the basis of European priorities) both to volunteers and to hosting communities.<sup>1</sup>

The ALLIANCE is part of an international movement: The *International Voluntary Service Movement*, that involves more 200 organizations, from different international and regional networks and consequently involving 40.000 volunteer places in more than 4.000 international voluntary projects in local communities the majority taking place in the Council of Europe countries.

As IVS networks and organizations we support that with this initiative the European Institutions are re-opening the discussion on volunteering at European and International level. Nonetheless, we see a lot of challenges and open questions in the ongoing process. In this position paper we highlight some key points that must be taken into account when establishing the legal framework for the initiative that was launched on December 7, 2016 by the European Commission:

- To ensure that within the accreditation process of the ESC the **quality** of the projects is assessed and they reflect the core values of volunteering and solidarity such as peace, social inclusion, freedom of movement, social and climate justice and gender equality. The project should aim at providing a **non-formal** education as well as informal learning experience to the volunteers but also have a strong **impact** on the local communities where projects take place (mutual support involving all actors in the process: volunteers, local communities, sending and hosting organisations). Therefore, the accreditation should be reserved to **non-profit** organisations, assessed in regard of their sustainability and principles of good governance
- To ensure that ESC will complement as well as strengthen the existing programs, e.g. the European Voluntary Service but also valorise International Voluntary Service experiences, among which long and medium term but also short term projects such as **workcamps**, that involve more than **30.000 volunteers** worldwide every year. The

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<sup>1</sup> Further information on the impact of Workcamps can be found in the results of a study carried out within the past years: <http://www.alliance-network.eu/what-is-the-impact-of-workcamps/2016/3108/>

existing common frame of cooperation already ensures high quality projects with benefits for all actors involved, but also additional opportunities for **disadvantaged volunteers**. These existing structures must not be weakened but should be especially supported.

- To ensure clear and sustainable **funding** for the ESC: The funding cannot endanger or overshadow the objectives of existing programs, e.g. EVS, and voluntary service organizations must be included in the implementation and monitoring. Additional funding for the inclusion of short term and community based voluntary projects such as **workcamps**, e.g. by supporting local communities in hosting volunteers, must be made available to support this strand. A European entity/agency (e.g. EACEA) should facilitate dialogue with stakeholders and promote the program.
- To ensure that **volunteers** are being prepared, actively involved and accompanied in all stages of the projects and missions they are assigned to, also through a quality **monitoring** system including national or regional agencies. This should be done through an active involvement of **sending organisations** as well as cooperation between sending and receiving organisations, as key elements to guarantee a long-term impact on volunteers and local communities. NGOs that have been active in the volunteering sector for many years should be actively involved in the accreditation process of local projects and can also be relevant multipliers of the ESC.
- To foresee opportunities and possibilities to open the **geographical scope** and widen it beyond the EU members, creating synergies and room for cooperation also with voluntary organisations and networks at a global level. To widen the scope to Council of Europe member states should be ensured as well.
- Considering the proven value of volunteering (see footnote 1), the **limit** to 30 years for participation in the initiative is a limit to the involvement of European citizens in volunteering. That seems to turn the initiative into a "measure for youth employment" and not a program that expresses and calls for solidarity in Europe. All European citizens should be eligible to participate in this initiative, without age limit. We might rather consider the idea of providing two categories "junior" and "senior" as EU Aid Volunteer Initiative, for example.
- To clearly **separate** the voluntary strand from the professional strand. Voluntary activities should never replace paid work. The ESC must avoid to create precarious job positions, underpaid or not paid at all.

The development of the ESC should contribute to the **harmonization** of national legislations within the EU member states in order to recognize and guarantee the social rights of the volunteers. All participants of ESC should gain social benefits in terms of access to unemployment support, public health care, recognition of their experience and acquired competences<sup>2</sup> etc. during their service.

We strongly believe that Europe needs to rethink and rebuild its common roots, from peace, solidarity and multiculturalism, now more than ever. This process should start from rediscovering a common understanding of cooperation, active citizenship and volunteering, particularly in young people. That's how IVS was born after 1st world war, and that's what our movement will continue to work for.

Supported by  
CCIVS – The Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service

<sup>2</sup> See also the results of a project which provided a methodology for the recognition of competences in Workcamps and Voluntary Service Projects on <http://www.ive-experienced.eu/the-system-outputs/>